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ADAMS LAKE STATE PARK AND
STATE NATURE PRESERVEKEY AT-A-GLANCE
INFORMATION**LENGTH:** 1.9 miles**CONFIGURATION:** Lollipop**DIFFICULTY:** Easy**SCENERY:** Lake, xeric prairie, and Allegheny mound ants**EXPOSURE:** Sun**TRAFFIC:** Moderate**TRAIL SURFACE:** Paved and gravel**HIKING TIME:** 1–1.5 hours**DRIVING DISTANCE:** Less than 10 minutes north of West Union**SEASON:** Year-round**ACCESS:** Sunrise–sunset**MAPS:** USGS West Union; Adams Lake State Park and Nature Preserve map**WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE:** Lake Trail**FACILITIES:** Water fountains, restrooms, picnic benches, and shelters**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Shawnee State Park, (740) 858-6652 or ohiodnr.com.**SPECIAL COMMENTS:** Don't mess with the ants! Bring sunscreen and identification books for trees and prairie plants. Includes Lake, Prairie Dock and Post Oak hikes.

IN BRIEF

The hike starts lakeside and then enters the unique xeric prairie and oak forest. Adams County has a rich geological history, of which a small portion is visible on the nature preserve portion of the hike.

DESCRIPTION

This small state park offers a variety of activities, including hiking, fishing, picnicking, and enjoying the playground areas.

When you enter the park you'll see a small parking area to your right. Park in this area, secure your vehicle, and walk toward the boat ramp. On the other side of the ramp, a large boulder marks the beginning of the trail.

Eastern red cedars do very well in the limestone soils abundant in Adams County. In fact, the eastern red cedar is the backbone of a thriving business community that uses the red cedar wood to create bird feeders and birdhouses.

The Adams Lake State Park trail is the first trail on this hike. The paved trail borders the lake and is wide enough for two people to comfortably walk side by side. As at most parks in southern Ohio, Canada geese are everywhere. You'll readily see geese and other waterfowl species along the shoreline. Please do not feed the waterfowl; it is unhealthy for both birds and humans.

GPS Trailhead
Coordinates

UTM Zone (WGS84) 17S

Easting 0281062.1

Northing 4299072.0

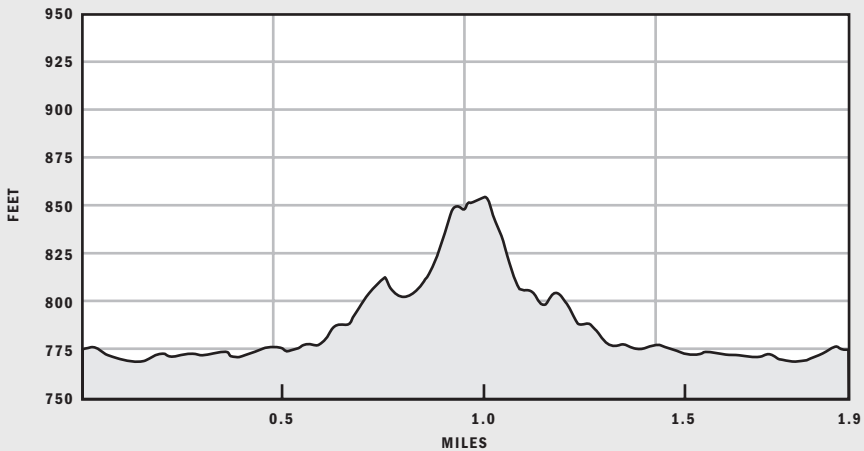
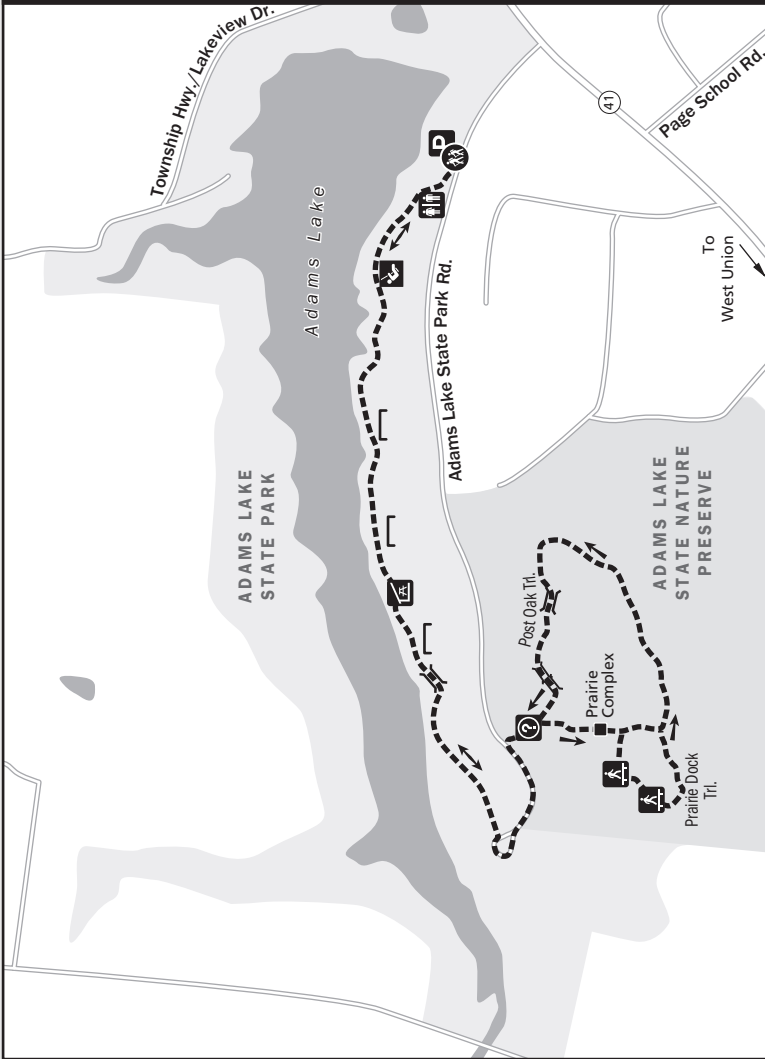
Latitude N 38° 48' 47.64"

Longitude W 83° 31' 17.76"

Directions 

From West Union, take OH 41 north less than 2 miles to the entrance of Adams Lake State Park and Adams Lake Prairie State Nature Preserve. The entrance to the park is on the left side of the road. Park your vehicle in the area near the boat ramp.

01 Adams Lake State Park and State Nature Preserve





Allegheny ant mound at
Adams Lake SNP

The paved trail was created in 1999 with Nature Works funding from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Look for a playground area shortly after you start, at 0.1 mile. If you like to fish, consider an afternoon relaxing along the lake's edge on one of the many benches overlooking the water.

You'll find red oaks, horseshoe pits, and a pavilion area at 0.37 miles. Cross the bridge over a small creek at 0.45 miles. The trail exits into an open area that is the turnaround for the road. Continue to your left and walk along the edge of the woods. On the right side of the road at 0.6 miles, you'll see the

trail that leads to the entrance of the nature preserve trail.

The Adams Lake Prairie State Nature Preserve's formal entrance, complete with an information kiosk, is at 0.87 miles. The gravel-covered trail leads uphill over several erosion control steps. The ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves maintains the xeric prairie area via prescribed burning every two to three years. The prescribed burns remove the plant competition for sunlight and other resources. The prairie plants in this area must have full sun to survive. Fire is simply used as a tool to remove saplings and brush that would shade out the sun-loving prairie plants, eventually killing them.

One of the most unusual things you'll see on this trail are Allegheny mound ants. When they bite, the ants' formidable mandibles (jaws) secrete formic acid. That's reason enough to stay on the trail. The mounds are impressive structures about two and a half feet tall and three feet in circumference at the base. The ants typically won't bother people as long as their mound is not disturbed. I'm strongly in favor of erring on the side of caution, though, so I don't stand too near an ant mound just in case the ants decide I'm disturbing it. But do spend some time watching these fascinating creatures go about their day.

The plants that you see in this area migrated to Ohio when the climate was much warmer and drier than it is today. Many are species of concern in Ohio and survive only in isolated areas where conditions favor drought-resistant species. Some of the plants in this unique prairie area include blazing star, American aloe, and rattlesnake master.

When you come to the trail junction a few feet beyond the kiosk, bear right onto Prairie Dock Trail. As you enter into the prairie area, you'll see plenty of prairie dock. This plant has large leaves and several yellow, daisylike flowers at the top of the naked stalk it sends up. You'll find a boardwalk 0.9 miles into the hike, after which the trail narrows to allow only single-file hiking. Look for the brilliant red blooms of blazing stars in this area. Within 200 feet of the first boardwalk is a second one.

This prairie area might look barren, but a complex system of life, death, and bartering occurs here. The small Edwards hairstreak butterfly has an interesting relationship with the Allegheny mound ants. Edwards hairstreak larvae produce a honeylike substance relished by Allegheny mound ants, so much so that the ants will act as bodyguards to protect the larvae from predators. The Edwards hairstreak is susceptible to attack from a small parasitic insect, but with the ants on guard, the larvae can survive and eventually become butterflies.

The ant mounds at 1.07 miles are nearly a yard high, with summertime populations of 100,000 workers per mound. Some of the mounds on this prairie area are more than 20 years old. Once again, please do not disturb them. When you come to the intersection a few feet ahead, turn to your right and take the path for about 40 feet, where you will see one of the larger Allegheny ant mounds on the right side of the trail.

Return to the junction and turn right onto Post Oak Trail. Ohio is home to 15 species of oaks, of which 14 can be found in Adams County, including blackjack, shingle, and post oak. The area where you're hiking was once heavily forested, but the need for weapons during the War of 1812 resulted in the iron industry consuming the trees. In fact, during that era, one to two acres of forest were cut down each day just to operate one iron furnace.

Cross a footbridge at 1.31 miles and slow down to enjoy the trail as it meanders through this beautiful oak forest. You'll see a mix of young and older saplings, as well as canopy trees, but sugar maples are beginning to take over the forest.

Cross two more footbridges before crossing a bridge at 1.4 miles and heading uphill, where you will see a large white oak tree. When the trail joins itself turn right to follow it to the kiosk you encountered earlier. Cross the street and return to the paved trail that borders the lake and will lead you back to your vehicle.

NEARBY ACTIVITIES

The Adams County area has several Amish shops, which sell everything from well-crafted furniture to cinnamon rolls. If you enjoyed this hike, you'll also like the Wilderness Trail and Buzzardroost Rock trail.